

# Post office commits to 200 block

By STEVE STROTH  
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Watsonville Mayor Betty Murphy took one look at the sheet of paper as she sat in City Hall yesterday and said, "Oh, whoopee!"

The page in Murphy's hand said simply that the U.S. Postal Service expects to complete the design and construction of a new post office in the 200 block of Main Street by January 1989.

That message was hand-delivered by two Postal Service officials, who told Murphy and City Manager John Radin that the Postal Service had already begun designing the building and expected to begin construction early next year.

The construction budget for the 25,000-square-foot building

still hasn't been approved by upper level postal officials, but the Watsonville project is a "top priority" and should get final approval within a month, said Clair Kenaston, a facilities planner for the Postal Service's Western Region.

Even if the project is bumped back to the next fiscal year, it would only mean a six-month delay, Kenaston said.

Murphy and Radin were obviously pleased to hear the news. Many local residents have expressed uncertainty about the project, which city leaders are banking on to spark a rejuvenation of the ailing downtown economy.

"I've taken a lot of flak from a lot of people (who said) the post office wouldn't be built,"

Radin said. "But I never lost hope."

It was one thing to believe it, Radin said, but it "felt good" to "hear it from the horse's mouth" and to silence the "rumor and conjecture about it not coming."

It's clear the city manager has staked his reputation on a successful redevelopment effort anchored by a new downtown post office. Mayor Murphy said yesterday it is the City Council, not just the city manager, that has a reputation at stake.

The city spent more than \$6 million buying up the entire 200 block of Main Street, moved out the old businesses and then leveled most of the old buildings. Three acres bounded by First and Rodriguez streets was then sold to the Postal Service,

and negotiations may be nearing fruition with a San Jose developer to build a shopping center on the remaining two acres.

"I think there was a feeling on the part of the public that we're just whistling Dixie around here, and that the post office wasn't going to get built," Murphy said. "But I knew that was just not true."

With the commitment of the Postal Service in hand, Murphy and Radin set about making sure the city has some say in how the new building will look.

If negotiations with San Jose developer Barry Swenson are successful in the next few weeks, Murphy is hoping the neighboring post office and shopping center projects can be designed together.